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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003801

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV AF
SUBJECT: AFGHAN NSA: KARZAI WILLING TO PUBLICLY ENDORSE
OBAMA STRATEGY

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Classified By: Ambassador Karl Eikenberry; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Afghan National Security Advisor (NSA) Zalmay Rassoul previewed President Karzai's next steps on key governance issues in our November 29 meeting. He predicted that Karzai would announce cabinet appointments on or around December 15, followed by appointments to his presidential office, and finally would name appointments of new governors on a rolling basis, beginning with replacement of the worst governors. Anticipating President Obama's December 1 announcement of troop increases, Rassoul said Karzai is willing to publicly endorse our combined strategy and to amplify Obama's message within Afghanistan. Finally, Rassoul shared key messages that Karzai would like to convey to President Obama when they next speak. End summary.

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Announcement of Cabinet Picks Expected by 15 December
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¶2. (C) In our November 29 meeting, Rassoul explained that President Karzai has been keeping his own counsel on cabinet appointments, but will share his nominations with me within the next few days and looks forward to receiving our Embassy's input. Rassoul reported that all ministerial appointments will be announced at once, on or around December 15. Ministers whom the United States have indicated are among the most effective, including Wardak, Rahimi, and Atmar, are very likely to be included in the next cabinet, Rassoul said. He mentioned that he is being considered as a replacement to Foreign Minister Spanta, and that Ali Jalali, former Minister of Interior, could possibly replace him as National Security Advisor. Rassoul predicted that there would be two women in the new cabinet: one as Minister of Women's Affairs and Bamyan Governor Sorabi as Minister of Labor and Social Affairs. Ashraf Ghani was also likely to have a place in the new government, possibly in a reform oversight capacity. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah was not slated to hold any position in the government, and President Karzai had made note of Abdullah's failure to send an Eid message to him, said Rassoul.

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Replacing the Energy Minister Proves Difficult
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¶3. (C) According to Rassoul, President Karzai is seriously considering replacing the Ministers of Mines, Higher Education, Public Works, and Energy. He confided that replacing the Minister of Energy was proving the most difficult for Karzai, but that Karzai understood the importance of making that change. Similarly, when I reminded Rassoul we are following closely the story of the Minister of the Hajj Chakari, and the commitment Karzai had made to Secretary Clinton in their one-on-one meeting to address the

serious allegations levied against Chakari, Rassoul replied that Karzai intended to move on replacing him as soon as the Hajj was completed. Karzai had agreed that the allegations were compelling enough to remove the minister, and that doing so would be relatively easy because the minister was only the acting minister, and had not been confirmed by Parliament. In sum, Karzai realizes that acting on the allegations against Chakari is an opportunity for him to show his commitment to governance and rule of law. His willingness to act, however, is not yet proven.

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COS Daudzai On His Way Out
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¶4. (C) Rassoul explained that following the cabinet shake-up, Karzai intended to announce the replacement of several members of his front office staff, including his Chief of Staff Daudzai and the Director of the Office of Administrative Affairs Saber Mudaber. No replacement for either has been selected. I suggested that after Karzai selects his new staff, key officials from donor countries who provide salary supplements to the president's staff must sit down with Karzai's new Chief of Staff and other senior advisors to inventory the sources of all the support and to consider executive office reorganization; Rassoul agreed.

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Replace the Worst Governors First
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¶5. (C) The third wave of personnel announcements will be the governors, Rassoul said. Karzai's strategy is to begin with replacing the worst governors in the first round and then to gradually replace others. Rassoul was unaware of any

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plan to remove Governor Mangal of Helmand or Kandahar Governor Wesa. I reiterated the importance of having strong governors to provide leadership in regions like Kandahar and Helmand, where the fighting is most intense and U.S. troops most concentrated. The success of military operations, I pointed out, often hinges on the availability of strong governance to buttress military activity. Acknowledging my point, Rassoul raised Karzai's interest in meeting with me over the next few days to discuss his overall appointment strategy.

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Karzai Eager to Endorse U.S. Afghan Strategy
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¶6. (C) I mentioned to Rassoul the possibility of President Obama's scheduling a phone call or SVTC with President Karzai prior to his announcement on his new Afghanistan strategy on December 1. Rassoul replied that Karzai looks forward to the discussion and has several points he would like to raise with President Obama. First, he welcomes the inclusion of Pakistan in the discussion on Afghanistan strategy because of the influence Pakistan has on the security situation in Afghanistan. Karzai will ask President Obama for America's assistance in working with Pakistan on security, and will stress that the military and political dimensions of achieving peace in Afghanistan can't be addressed unless the issue of sanctuary in Pakistan is made explicit and is a priority in the new strategy. He also said Karzai will emphasize the positive role that Saudi Arabia can play as a bridge to the Pakistani leadership. On the issue of Afghan National Security Forces, Karzai will say that he understands the central importance of a commitment from him and the Afghan people to take charge of the ANSF, especially the recruitment and leadership.

¶7. (C) Along these same lines, Rassoul continued, Karzai believes that Afghanistan requires security guarantees, including a defined strategic partnership with the United

States and a special status with NATO because of the realities of the difficult neighborhood in which Afghanistan lives. Finally, Karzai plans to raise development and governance issues, and to state his belief that he needs to connect the central government with the tribes, and especially to use the sub-national government as a way to connect with the Afghan people. He recognizes the need to mobilize the people to support the central government in his second term and will re-affirm his support for America's new development strategy which calls for directly disbursing funds to the Afghan government and prioritizes the agricultural sector.

¶ 8. (C) In his talk with President Obama, Karzai is interested in expressing his readiness to help amplify and publicly support the President's 1 December speech, said Rassoul. Karzai is prepared to engage with the media to show his solidarity and support, and welcomes suggestions from the White House on how he can shape his own messaging and best reinforce the media strategy. Finally, Rassoul reported, Karzai is likely to raise the issue of an international conference to be held in Kabul. While Karzai remains disappointed that the first conference will be held in London, he understands the political necessity of the schedule, and hopes that a Kabul conference can be convened this spring. A high-level foreign ministers conference in Kabul is greatly important to strengthening his government's standing and determination to assume leadership.

Eikenberry